

Everlasting love

by MarshAngel

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Summary: An alternate universe where Serena and darien find themselves in compromising situations.

## 1. Default Chapter Title

> <meta name="Generator"> Good heavens MarshAngel

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\*\*\_Everlasting Love\_\*\*

><strong><em><font><font><font>prologue<font>\_\*\*

Good heavens! What was it with those blasted females, he thought as he strode down the hall with an annoyed expression on his handsome face. What on God's green earth made them think they had the right to be late to every event, as if to torture each and every man forced to wait on them, giggle like silly schoolgirls over silly tidbits of conversation, and flirt as if it were their only purpose in life?

If he had to put up with another one of those ridiculous balls he was going to have to shoot himself, or the closest offending individual. He was tired of silly women falling over themselves trying to get his attention, and making every effort under the sun to try to please him. He was still young, he was tall, handsome, in great shape, and he still had all his hair, so why in the world did his parents want him to get married so soon? It wasn't like they were going to drop dead anytime soon, so why the big rush for him to marry? If he had it his way he'd stay a bachelor forever, or until he found true love, if such a thing existed; and if it did, forever would probably come first.

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> <p><font><font>Serena sighed tiredly. All this was so exasperating,

not to mention pointless in her view of things. Why couldn't her mother understand that she really didn't care about dressing up in those heavy gowns, ribbons and whatever other frippery that went with being "a proper lady." She just couldn't see herself waltzing in a ballroom or even walking gracefully, and in her case tripping over anything and everything in her way.<font>

True she was almost sixteen years old and most other girls of her status and age were busy with trying to be pretty and getting ready for their introduction to society and declaration of their readiness for marriage. She however spent most of her time out in the hills snuggled up to her favorite tree reading yet another of those books she loved so much. When she wasn't reading she was off somewhere riding her favorite horse, Blanca.

She was definitely Daddy's little girl. Her father adored her and had introduced her to riding and everything there was to love in nature. He taught her how to appreciate each and every sunset and how to watch the cute little white bunnies that hopped through the backyard, quietly without scaring them off. On the days when it was stormy or wet he had introduced her to so many different wonders in the world of books.

When her tutors had come by, they were fascinated with all the knowledge she had retained from everything she had read, and after much begging and pleading she convinced them to teach her everything they had taught her older brother, Andrew. She knew as much, and often much more than many men, especially in matters of history and philosophy.

She was also quite good in the art of sword fighting, and she handled a rapier better than most men could. Fencing lessons had taken a lot of begging and pleading for her father to come around. Her mother thought it highly improper, but she had long learned to accept and love her daughter's strange behavior. It never ceased to amaze those who knew her, that the same girl who performed the graceful, quick movements required in fencing, could constantly trip and fall over her own feet while performing the simple act of walking down any hallway.

She was about to open her mouth in protest to the yellow gown her mother and the seamstress had brought in for her to fit, but quickly shut it again when she saw the rebuking look her mother gave her, her piercing blue eyes staring up at her through pale blonde lashes, managing to make Serena feel remarkably even more uncomfortable than she did before. There would be no arguing in this matter. It was rare enough that Lady Graham had bothered to sit in on the fitting as it was. This time she had insisted that if it killed her, her daughter was going to like a proper lady whether she liked it or not. This was the fifth dress Serena had tried on today and she was tired of being pulled and pinned. She wasn't even allowed an opinion in the matter as her mother insisted on making all the decisions, knowing that if Serena had her way there would be no dresses at all.

Serena's stomach growled loudly, announcing to everyone in the room that it was time for lunch. "Alright Serena," her mother sighed exasperatedly, brushing back a white-blond strand that had fallen loose and into her face, causing Serena to blush in embarrassment. "We'll take a break for lunch now and continue the fittings later this afternoon." Serena gratefully stepped down from the stool,

barely managing not to trip and rip the new gown in the process, and hurriedly changed back into her morning gown and rushed down the stairs and out onto the patio where lunch would be served. She was early, which was normal for her. She was late for just about everything else except her meals.

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> <p><font><font>"Lord Wyndham, there is a message here for you and it's marked urgent," Darien's butler announced on entrance to Darien's office. "It doesn't sound like good news my lord."<font>

"Anything marked urgent is hardly good news, Jones." He sighed, turned to face the tall white-haired man before him, and accepted the letter, hoping it was nothing serious, but nevertheless feeling a great sense of foreboding. He opened the letter slowly as if attempting to delay the news. He turned away from the large window overlooking the vast meadow that led up to the wide expanse of trees in the distance. The light from the window seemed to mock his mood, which had become darker with the arrival of the letter.

He pulled the letter from its envelope, opened it, and began to read. Only one line in the short note caught his eye and made sense.

\_I regretfully inform you that your parents' carriage collided with another and the occupants of both carriages were killed in the accident\_

He sat down in the leather chair beneath him and stared at the wall refusing himself the release of tears.

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"Lord Wyndham, there is a message here for you and it's marked urgent," Darien's butler announced on entrance to Darien's office. "It doesn't sound like good news my lord."

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><font>He pulled the letter from its envelope, opened it, and began to read. Only one line in the short note caught his eye and made sense.<font>

> <p>

> \_I regretfully inform you that your parents' carriage was

overturned and both were killed in the accident\_

He sat down in the leather chair beneath him and stared at the wall refusing himself the release of tears.

\* \* \*

> <p><font>"Milady, milady," Agatha yelled while running down the hall, the ends of her long skirt in her hands. She almost tripped before she could reach Serena who was just outside the open doors that led to the rose gardens.<font>

><font>"Whatever is the matter, Agatha?" Serena questioned concernedly.<font>

><font>"The Duke is in your father's office," she gasped trying to catch her breath. "He wishes to see you immediately. It appears to be very serious. I hope everything's fine."<font>

><font>"I hope so too Agatha."<font>

><font>Serena disliked the man that stood downstairs in her father's office waiting for her appearance, but if he could appear to care about anything, as Agatha had suggested he had looked, then it must be very serious indeed. In her hurry to find out what matter could possibly require the presence of her father's older brother, she had forgotten her attire. After sword practice this morning she hadn't bothered to change her clothing before going out into the gardens and so she rushed into the office in a loose men's shirt and dark breeches. Her long blonde hair had been pulled back into a long loose ponytail that fell down her back to her knees.<font>

><font>Her uncle looked down his nose at her in disapproval. His hard angled face would have been remarkably handsome especially in contrast to his silvery hair if he had bothered to replace his permanent frown with even the smallest of smiles. He had always thought his brother and his wife had always been weak with their daughter, but the wisp of a girl with messy blonde hair, dressed in men's clothing standing before him was just proof that they had been far too lenient. For Christ's sake the girl was running wild! That would change however. He'd make sure of it.<font>

><font>Serena didn't like her uncle much. He was strict and cold, not to mention a complete bore. She had often wondered how he and her father had come from the same family. She put up with him however because he was family and if he was a relative of her father's he must have a soft spot somewhere inside, despite the fact that previous situations pointed in the opposite direction. Most people who knew him disliked him and that was the best they'd say about him.<font>

><font>"Serena, I'm afraid I have some terrible news," the Duke said in a rather gruff tone. "I'm afraid your parents were in a carriage accident and they were both killed instantly." If he could have been more blunt the maid outside the door couldn't possibly see how.

Agatha gasped before covering her mouth realizing she really shouldn't be eavesdropping outside the door. Oh the poor girl! Someone so young and innocent does not deserve this. She could barely believe that any of this was happening.<font>

><font>Serena's face turned a pasty white and her legs collapsed beneath her as she went unconscious. The Duke sighed. He should have expected as much. He was mildly upset with himself for neglecting to prepare for her expected fainting spell. Women could never handle such things.<font>

><font>He picked her slumped body up from the floor and placed her on the couch before ringing for the maid to bring him some smelling salts. When the maid arrived with the salts he changed his mind and

decided to let her sleep off the shock in the comfort of her own bed. With that final thought he brought her upstairs and had her immediately put to bed.<font>  
> <p>

\* \* \*

> <p><font>The carriage rocked gently back and forth as it moved onward to it's destination. It had been a full week since the funeral and Serena was weak and tired. It had been a while since she had sat down to a full meal and she had lost weight and her face had lost its glow to become pale and her eyes sunken. Even in her depressed state of mind and body, she had to admire the beauty of Muncaster Castle, her uncle's home. Her home at Weston Park was beautiful but was really no comparison to the grand mansion before her. The gardens here were some of the most beautiful she had seen and even though the building itself was quite imposing, the grounds more than made up for the dark, forbidding structure. She remembered the beautiful Azaleas and Rhododendrons from visits when she was younger and the Esk River that ran behind the great castle. This might not be so bad after all.<font>

><font>When she was settled in her room that overlooked the river, she stared in the mirror atop her vanity and sighed. This was her home now. With her parent's death she was now her uncle's responsibility. She missed her parents so much. Her Uncle was so cold and strict. She knew she wouldn't be able to do half the things that she had done at home. Here she would have to follow his rules, however ridiculous they might be. She would not dishonor the memory of her parents.<font>  
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everlastinglove2